



October 1, 2003

The Honorable Rahm Emanuel
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As the Governors of our nation's Great Lakes States, we would like to express our appreciation for the introduction of S.1398, "The Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Act" and H.R.2720, the "Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act." We recognize that despite the many federal, state and local efforts currently underway to restore and protect them, the Great Lakes remain at risk of damage from continuing pollution, environmental degradation and unsustainable water resource management practices. We applaud the bills' sponsors and cosponsors for acting to address these threats and are heartened by the potential for substantial additional federal dollars to abate them.

Two decades ago our States jointly formed the Council of Great Lakes Governors, in part to fulfill our lead responsibilities as stewards of the Great Lakes Basin's water resources and in recognition of the tremendous ecological, economic and social benefits they provide. The Great Lakes Governors remain committed to protecting and restoring the natural habitat and water quality of the Great Lakes Basin; preserving diverse and thriving plant and animal communities; protecting the water supply; and, safeguarding human health.

The Region's Governors have reached consensus that the following priorities should guide Great Lakes restoration and protection efforts:

- Ensure the sustainable use of our water resources while confirming that the States retain authority over water use and diversions of Great Lakes waters.
- Promote programs to protect human health against adverse effects of pollution in the Great Lakes ecosystem.
- Control pollution from diffuse sources into water, land and air.
- Continue to reduce the introduction of persistent bioaccumulative toxics into the Great Lakes ecosystem.
- Stop the introduction and spread of non-native aquatic invasive species.
- Enhance fish and wildlife by restoring and protecting coastal wetlands, fish and wildlife habitats.
- Restore to environmental health the Areas of Concern identified by the International Joint Commission as needing remediation.
- Standardize and enhance the methods by which information is collected, recorded and shared within the region.
- Adopt sustainable use practices that protect environmental resources and may enhance the recreational and commercial value of our Great Lakes.

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Last year, in response to the request of members of the Great Lakes Congressional Task Force and under the leadership of its Chairman, Governor Bob Taft, the Council launched the *Great Lakes Governors' Priorities Task Force*. The premise of the Task Force's work to date has been that coordinated planning is needed to achieve comprehensive restoration and protection of the Great Lakes while making efficient use of limited resources. Working with the Great Lakes Congressional delegation, Great Lakes Mayors, and stakeholders throughout the region, we believe a broad based plan can be constructed in the context of pending legislation, thus providing both a blueprint for restoration and protection and critically needed federal resources to implement it. This plan should build on the significant State and Federal investments to date, value broad public participation, foster sound public policy and sustainable behavior, and address the environmental issues of the present and anticipate the challenges of tomorrow so that the Great Lakes experience full restoration and protection, balanced with economic prosperity.


We will soon present to Congress detailed comments on S. 1398 and H.R. 2720. As the legislative process moves forward, the Great Lakes Governors encourage Congress to work toward enactment of a bill that encompasses these overarching principles:

- minimal bureaucracy, allowing efforts to be directed toward protection and restoration rather than toward process and paperwork;
- affordable non-federal match requirements, particularly in light of ongoing and significant State investments in Great Lakes restoration;
- coordination of the efforts of the many government and non-governmental entities involved in protection and restoration activities; and,
- recognition of the leadership role of the Great Lakes Governors in defining regional priorities.


While the approach of the House and Senate bills is not identical, there are elements of these principles in each. The two bills are a similarly strong expression of Congressional intent to invest significant additional resources in Great Lakes protection and improvements, while seeking coordination throughout the region. We are also pleased to see both bills address the development of water quality indicators as a measure of progress.


In addition to detailed comments on the legislation, we plan to submit a short-term agenda to help guide spending decisions while a more comprehensive protection and restoration funding program is being developed. We believe it is vital to maintain the momentum of federal, state, and local governments, along with multiple stakeholder groups, on those projects and programs that are furthering our restoration goals today.

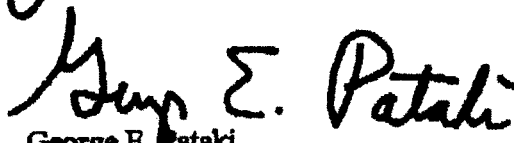
We welcome the opportunity to join you in building momentum for this historic advance in national support for the world's largest source of fresh surface water. We look forward to building on the partnership between the region's Governors and the Great Lakes Congressional Task Force to secure the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem for generations to come.


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